

ON

REtainer

an isOLation

zine

BY

half

HEART

Arts

INTRODUCTION

We are excited to present this slim volume of poems from the minds of young writers. The continuing COVID crisis has kept us away from others, often alone and in some variety of limbo, for over a year now. Our interactions within our communities are restricted. We haven't seen our friends in a while. Equilibrium eludes our sense of self. It's been tricky.

But cloistered off by ourselves we strove to connect, to express and listen, to share and to appreciate the earnest joys and pains which have accompanied these recent years. In these pages you will find people reckoning with injustice, with their own minds, with the choices other people have made, with the choices we make every day without thinking about it. And they do an admirable, honest job. It's really something.

We met these writers in a few different ways. Some were poetry classmates. Or we lived in a dorm together. Or we met at a show, or online. The common thread is an abiding love of communication and artistic release. They continue to impress and we can't wait to see what they do next. We really hope you get a chance to meet them.

your friends the editors,

Daniel Mattson
Ryleigh Norgrove
Dan Johnston

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BILLY ULLMANN

I'd Send This to You but I Don't Think You Deserve a Reply to Your Email

I am a child, your child and here I am,
Sobbing before you. It always starts
as a wee gaping in the throat. A noiseless
ejaculation grows this missingness before
it crawls down and nestles itself in the rib bones.

A new home, soon enough tainted.

So it's tartly gutted.

Did you understand that flux breeds decay,

an inbox filled with fruit fly static?

Please, just look at my skull gushing.

This cherry, syrupy cocktail pouring out of an hole,

A yawning orifice, ever unsealing-

Let's stay awake a little longer, you decide.

You uttered once that you were a child like I am and

Has there always been

Unclaimed baggage in that corner?

Crack your neck, tender authority to gravity,

nose-dive.

Your hands are wet with sweat

burrowed in dimples in walls

in pockets. Putrefying and puckered,

my hands secretly yours.

We're not familiar but your hands are my hands;

This is a vacuum I feel only when I bandage your-

My pointer finger.

Pressure can only stop the flowing for so long until I ask again

Why can't I grasp the something we both lacked?



If you would only ask, I'd bare the rotting recesses in my heart,
aching like a cavity, drenched in sweet tea and throbbing.
Always an embrave emptiness
if you're familiar. You insist that we should be.
But what is the form of an object that doesn't exist?
I draw it and give it a name, hand the paper to you.
Growing in your chest, a hollow, hollow cave.
You are a child, somebody's child, and you are sobbing.



Unpalatable Meat (Domesticity)

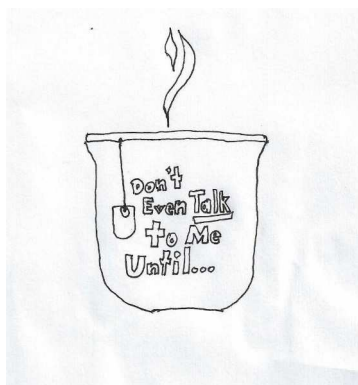
Obviously you don't need to tell me about it, when you wake up to no coffee in the pot and the heart you left to defrost in the sink froze over again. Somebody left the window open in the kitchen and when you ask me about it, my jaw clenches and slivers of paper curl, always inwards, always away from you, though I didn't leave it open. Once, I asked to borrow a drill from you. But could I please keep it forever? As if oath, a knot that could never be undone. Oh, we were once warm and malleable but this heart in the sink is a shiny brittle mass, with crystals of ice kissing the damn thing. Don't look now, our housemate dropped their dirty dishes on the flesh.

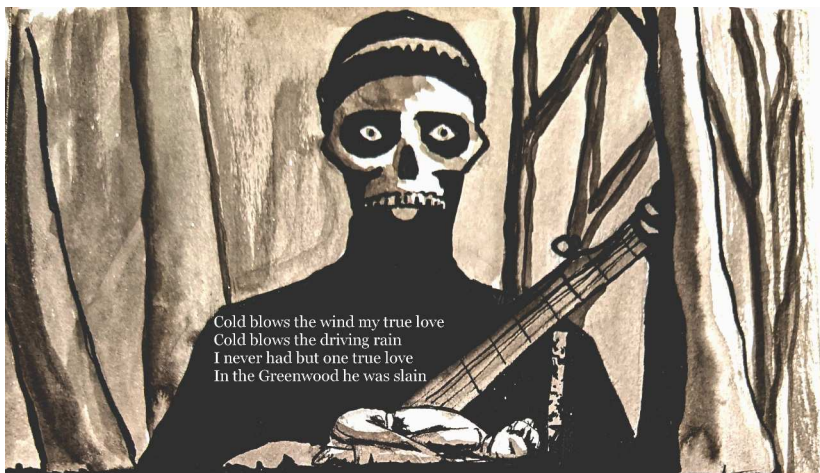
Oversteeped Tea (Domesticity Too)

Dreamless and again awake, I feed the cats, refill their water, and before you wake up, I pack the hearse, parked crooked on the grass, to a shaky fullness. I have been unraveling lately. I stand at the bathroom sink, toothbrush in my mouth, flipping a dime. A mug of earl grey on the counter downstairs, steaming and losing heat while the coin clinks on the ceramic and then disappears down the drain. For a second or two, three, or four, I think this must be a sign- then no, I've changed my mind:

This is a choice.

I spit out toothpaste, tinted a calamine pink with blood and return to my tea, now bitter and cool. The cup briefly and wordlessly warms my cold fingers, the way only your hands can. Despite a twisting sour taste in my mouth, I swallow it all past a lump. I think of how I may miss our particular kind of domesticity, all this time aching like a bruise I won't stop poking, but I scrub that urge away, wash the empty mug and return it to its home on the shelf. I tie my boots, the laces intertwined, a knot feeling.





Cold blows the wind my true love
Cold blows the driving rain
I never had but one true love
In the Greenwood he was slain

I'll do as much for my true love
As any woman may,
I'll sit and mourn all on his grave
For twelve months and a day

When twelve months and a day had passed
The dead began to speak,
Saying who is this who mourns for me
And will not let me sleep?

One kiss more my own true love
One more kiss I crave,
Give me a kiss of your sweet lips
And I'll go from your grave



My lips are cold as clay true love
My breath is sulfur strong,
If you kiss my rotting lips
your days will not be long

Mourn not for me my own true love
Mourn not for me I pray,
For I must leave you all alone
Til Death calls you away

SPOOKY S. BONEMAN, "LEATHERSTOCKING AND THE
UNQUIET GRAVE".

Condolences

We have a heavy feat here.
Underneath.
It's concrete and limestone
below our skin,
unseen.

We have a heavy feat here.
Below our skin,
unseen.
I'm so sorry that that happened
But it's what they cannot see...

It's a slow and steady pull,
an extra credit point,
a participation trophy for a project,
unforeseen.

And I feel like a soldier.
Whose armor,
is hidden.
People say survivor,
but how can I survive
something that will *always* be?

We have a *heavy* feat here.

No one wants to take this
concrete, solid ton of rocks and
put it on *their* backs!
No, we never want to be the one the burden wants to bear.



The one it lays on,
and laughs at,
and keeps up at night,

as it taunts us,
and blames us,
and says it's our fault.

And I remember sitting there...
Some dreaded diagnosis to lock it in tight.
"PTSD"- she says.

"Can you accept that?"- she asks.
"This Deal,"- she says.
"The rest of your life"-she says.

She said I will get through,
she says
But this concrete tells me otherwise.

We have a heavy feat here.

A cinder from the past.

We never want to be the one
the burden wants to bear.
I'm so sorry that that happened.

But it's still happening, you see?
We don't get some monthly bonus for this burden.

Save that cheap and short condolence,
from those who cannot understand

from those who'll never have to wear that fucking burden on their
backs,
from those whose strength is not congested by its pull.

And the hardest thing about this is, I'm wrong.

See, most of us will be the one
that that burden will bear.

We've all heard that cheap condolence and obliged.

We've all handed it out
and waited for them
to minimize its pain:

"Oh don't worry,
it's fine,
it happened so long ago."

We've all expected to hear it,
but instead have been told:

"Yeah?
So what?
That happened to Me Too."

We never want to be the one the burden wants to bear.

So I'll say to you again,
for as little as it's worth.

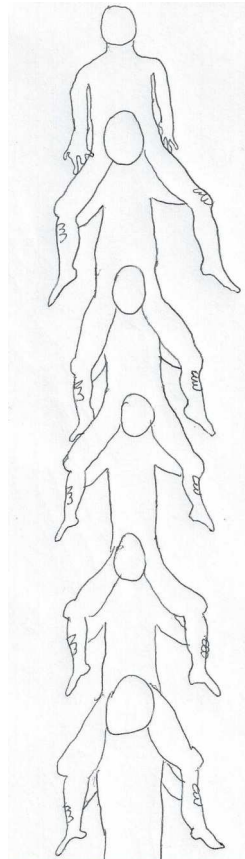
I'm so sorry that that happened.
I'm so sorry for this deal.

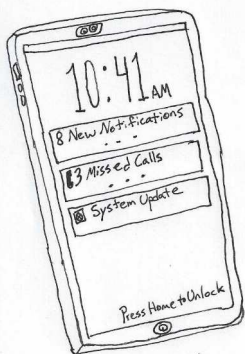


BEN "TWITCH" SCHIFF

"Shoulders"

"Stand up straight
And square your shoulders"
Said my dad firmly
As we stood apart
Hands in fists
Balled up tight
I was shaking
From fear and adrenaline
Then he stared
Into my eyes
And throwing my anxiety
Into my dad's chest
And instantly
He collapsed
Into an asthma attack
And I rushed to pick him up
His whole weight in my arms
And we stumbled to his room
Like two drunken soldiers
Squeezing out nervous laughter
Thinking things would be different
But there we were
Learning the sad truth
That as I got stronger
He would grow closer to death.

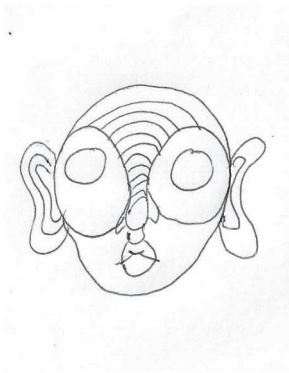




The Call

When we got the call
It was late morning
My phone buzzing in class
There had been an accident
And Dad was arrested
Woozy from medication
His work sent him home
Thinking he was intoxicated
But when he got home
He blacked out
And in the frigid winter
He tried to light a fire
Grabbing motor oil
Instead of lighter fluid
Catching the living room
Into flames
And his employees
Misunderstood
Thinking he was trying
To kill us
And so I remember
The head sheriff
Knocking on my door
As I'm home alone
In the charred room
Hitting a bong
And answering the door
As the tall beared man
Said "I'm sorry"
And drove away





Swimming Lessons

I can still smell the chlorine
Sticking to the humidity covered
Tiles of the walls in that YMCA
In that what seemed like an ocean
At that time of four at the most
And I held tight to my dad
So tight as he dunked us under
His hands grasping my toothpick legs
As not to let me drift away
And I still held on
Careful not to choke him
Hoping neither of us
Would ever let go
And you would bring me back up

But now you're not here to hold me
And it's been so long
I have to loot at old photos
To remember that joyous grin
And think of that day
My straw colored hair shining
Crooked teeth lining my laughter
Because as soon as you brought us up
I knew there would be another way
To breathe air again

PATRICK HEMMER

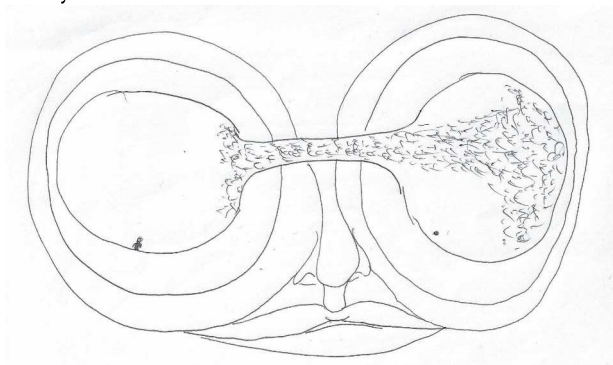
The View from Halfway Down, Variations

My inner voices loudly scream
for me, my best known stranger
Echoes clanging down the halls
to warn of morrow's danger
Sounding like an angel's thought
that's promising redemption
It's slowly turning into me
and filling me with tension

If I had only known about
The view from halfway down

Sleep's just death being shy,
didn't want to sleep forever
But the ground is reaching out for now
since I left my guarding pleasures
Now as the wind is hugging me
the gate keeps getting closer
Oh how, I think, I could have thought
of this to be the answer

If I had only known about
The view from halfway down



MALACHI KORESH

Mule

Every day I wake up

Eventually life

Knocks me down

Childish illusions of love

A false sense of home

Torn asunder

By the hands

Of this sad state

Can't stop

Not allowed to stop

Praying for it to cease

we

Reside in

A tired mule

Forced down

A beaten path

Punished if hesitant

Put down if insubordinate

Carrying someone

Else's

Load

Splintering hooves

Mud caked and sore

Legs burning

From exhaustive

Work and

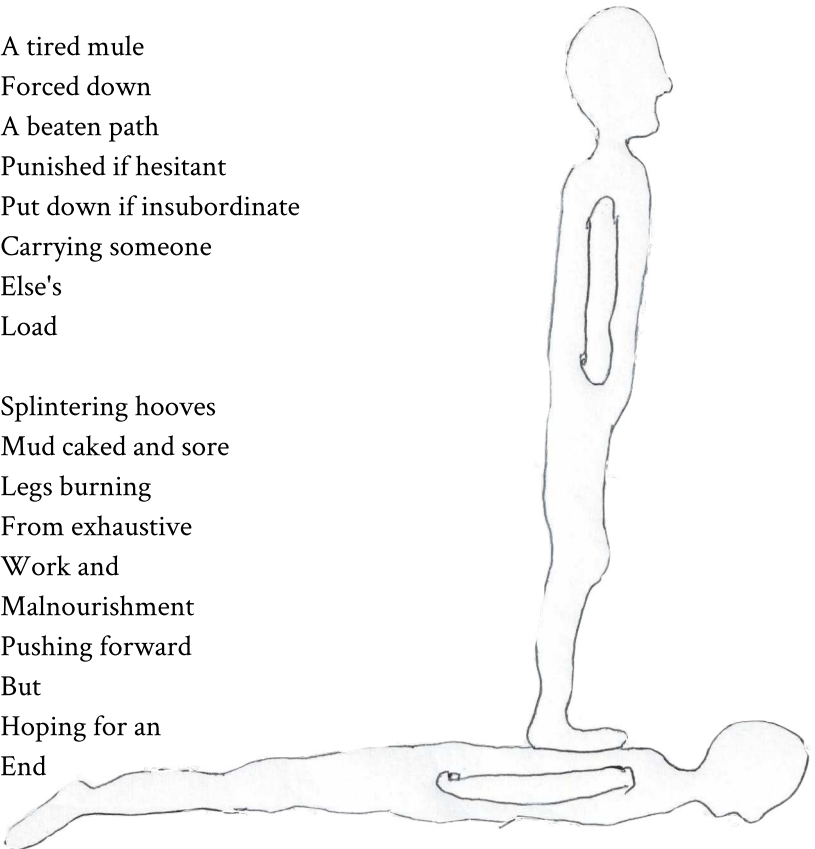
Malnourishment

Pushing forward

But

Hoping for an

End



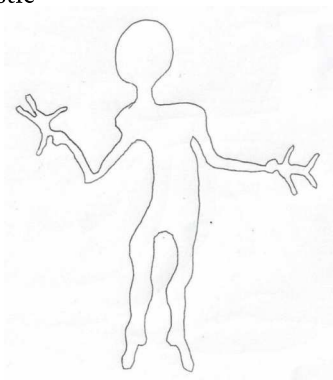
that scene from eyes wide shut

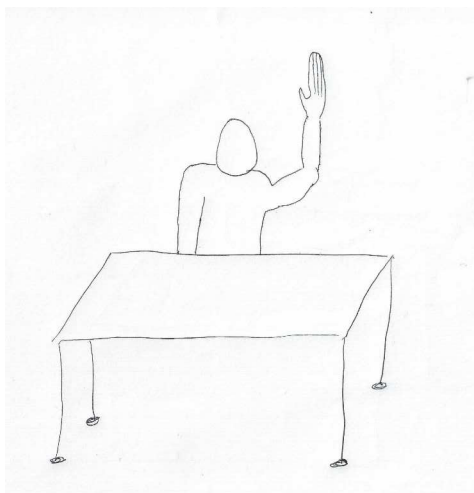
That scene from eyes wide shut
they take off the masks

Some of yall arent friends but
opportunists
Like a tick sucking em dry
A flea jumping from one host to another
An itch I cant scratch such a bother

A pleasant facade to mask the disgust
beneath
You'd sell your people out for a little peace
Such selfishness cloaked in individualistic
thoughts
Wanting trust is all I sought
Veils have been cracked
And people have started to speak
No longer will yall hide
Its time to face defeat

All I ask is the same loyalty I offer you
To have my back til the day is through
However your nature has finally shown true
And now I know I never really knew you





No

All ages til they are too old or have a kid
No sexism til he wad drunk and didn't mean it
No transphobia til he misgenders them
but no one speaks up
No homophobia til he says a slur but it's
ok he kissed a guy once
No racism til you get called out but I'm not
racist cause...
No anti-Semitic behavior til they share a
conspiracy theory but they don't focus on
the Jewish aspect
No Islamaphobia til it's ALL religions
No hate unless you don't fit into our punk
boxes
We are all equal unless you got clout

JAY HADFIELD

Near Death

In the not-yet-Spring night, young and cool,
fog seeping from the sun-bleached asphalt,
we cross the lot spanning dispensary to market,
to the last lit store in our dead-by-seven town.

A man--tired-looking, grey, maybe stoned or glaucomic--
restocks boxes of gum by the handful.

The cashier--as tired, less grey--counts cash for closing,
his bullet-proof box all plastered with print-outs.

You're ringing up; I idle a few paces behind,
turning and eyeing our environs absentmindedly.

One of those taped-up print-outs peeks over you:
sickly pale blue; bold letters centered; faceless font.

Memorial Service for Wei, 3pm Saturday, 2/29
13 Harcourt Way. Open to the public.

There's this picture, grainy, poorly-cropped,
of a sixty-something man who must be--have been--Wei.

I get a kind of eerie feeling, like you know I sometimes get;
the acute sense of mortality that turns me always to you.

But you're still swiping, flipping, re-swiping your card,
the cashier tapping his screen and saying try again now.



I peer anxiously again at the blue-grey face,
hung here haunting this fluorescent-lit counter,
desperate to recall some fleeting encounter,
when maybe he asked me for ID, or didn't.

Behind another register a woman, mid 50s, counts something
seriously.

I hadn't noticed her. She doesn't look up. Just counts.

For a moment I forget the hastily pasted jpeg,
grainy face and grainy eyes blurring into blue.

But when I look back towards you, he's there, just above you:
the dead man looking calmly from his flyer the color of asphyxiate lips.

I look to the door in some futile escapist urge,
and see there something I'd walked right by:

a simple, modest shrine. Some cheap bouquets,
a framed photo of Wei just a bit better than the first.

He is almost smiling in this one. There's a clipboard with a pen,
and some registry of condolences or RSVPs for the funeral,
I don't know. I don't know what it could be.
But I wish someone would sign it, and I know it can't be me.

You're still finishing up with the cashier so I squirm motionlessly,
staring at the linoleum where, please God, there is nothing unnoticed.

Someone comes in who must be a regular,
because the man in the grey scruff sees her and says:

We got your gum! in a kind of bright way,
bright like the sun through weeklong Oregon clouds.

The regular doesn't answer, just walks up, straightaway,
to the woman counting behind the counter,
who now looks up and finds herself, all at once,
in the embrace of this American woman.

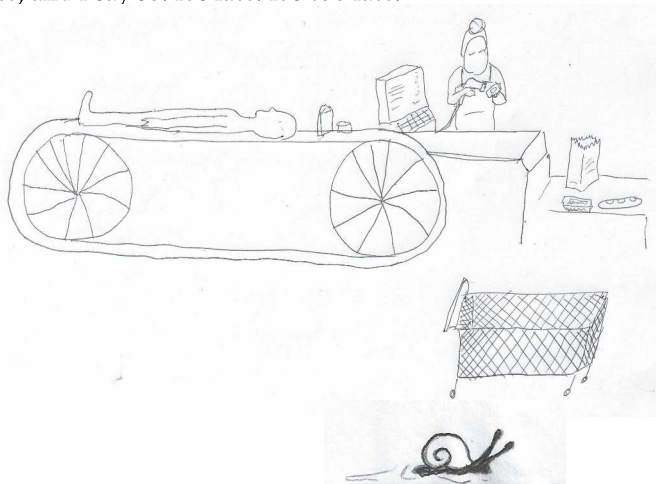
Her face hangs over the customer's shoulder,
staring, dissolving, distant as her husband's.

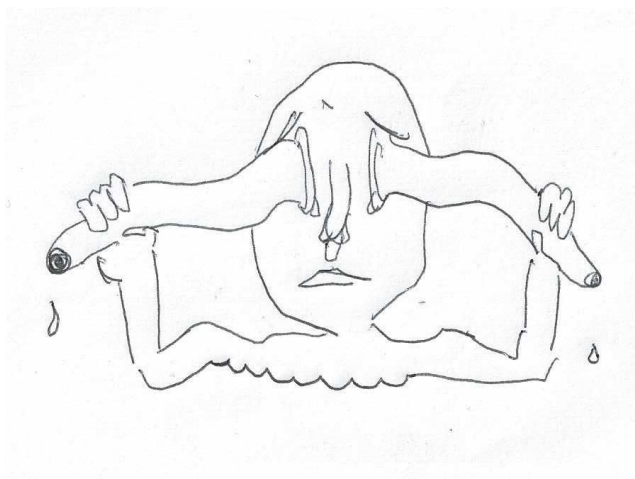
She remembers to lift her own arms,
holds tentatively to the acquaintance shoulders,
and she and her customer who chews gum share quiet, unspeakable
words,
or perhaps just part their pale lips.

Then I'm following you out the back door, passing again the little
shrine,
into the brisk February evening, clouds just where we left them.

You say maybe we should go get some dinner or something
somewhere.

but it's late, and I say so. It's late. It's too late.





What We Poets Really Are

The must of pages read and wine, red.

The feat of fitting bellflowers in an estate sale, and the toll.

The headless rat by the tracks, paws upturned in prayer.

And the crow cawing throatily, pecking his neck.

A Dream

I am living in a camper
On my alma mater's quad.
A campfire burns all night
And in the morning smolders.

A squirrel scurries over,
Picking around the hot remains,
And cautiously considers
Some pieces of burning litter.

I am afraid of frightening him,
So I stay perfectly still,
Dream-still, and watch
He scurries off, thank God.

We do not witness the start
Of another wildfire season.

A pigeon swoops down,
And with no hesitation, none,
Plucks the paper up and hops
Into the fire. In the fire

It stares right at me now, through
The camper window.
Bright tendrils blacken feathers,
And reach for the leaves above.

I am awake in bed and sweating,
Slowly breathing still beside me.
But the burning black bird
Still stares through the camper window.

And even through my pillow
I smell the choking smoke.



DAN JOHNSTON

Stirrings No. 2

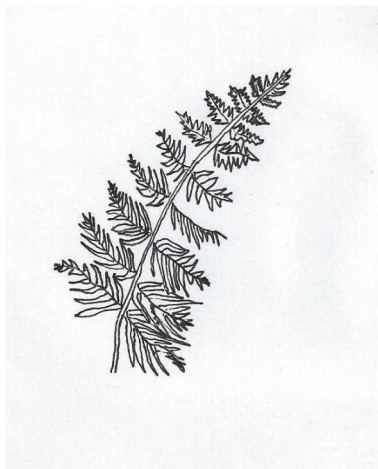
barefoot
even though you step on
all sorts of stuff that hurts.
knobby pear branches.
blackberry thorns.
old nails.

sleeveless, in shorts,
wind chill below forty
tight dry bluing skin;
you chatter smiles.

you sniff,
traipsing through fern blades
which send seeking, gentle spores
to clog your mucous membranes.

you get down low
to get a good look at
snakes with bright markings.

swimming, barnacles punishing you,
and you stay in the water.
the warmer, warmer water.



My Problem with Aubades Is They All Sound Like:

you and I wake up together. in a bed.
your skin has sunlight on it.
your morning person-smell.
the sheets are rumpled. so is your hair.
we are both breathing.
your body is like the things in this room
that I think are cool & beautiful
I remember before we woke up.
I remember before we were sleeping.
finger tracing.
there is breakfast in our future.
food and sunlight and sheets
are gently erotic.
you and I are gently erotic, too.
the word "lazily".
something ephemeral, maybe dust motes.
maybe it's raining, too, and the
raining sunlight is
also gently erotic.
we don't want to get out of bed
because we like sleep
and because we are in love.
not getting out of bed with someone you love
makes you want to brag.
also birds, probably

Stirrings No. 7

For hundreds of years people contributed to this hill, dumping cars and washing machines and freezer-burnt sausages and batteries and chickenshit and chemistry sets. Sometimes they dumped each other too, no doubt, few reeking trash collectors or reeking morticians to facilitate proper disposals. Indeed, there were no more service industries of any kind. Only a few gaunt folk heroes were left: Jobs, sunk in the shadow of their own landfill hill-and-monument.

After hundreds of years a creature was born from the refuse. She had computer parts and fur and moldfuzz for skin. She had an american flag stuck to her sole like old-fashioned toilet paper. She had Ziploc lungs and a car battery for a heart and feathers pushing out of her scalp and she hadn't been fashioned in anybody's image. She'd grown herself.

The folk heroes wailed and gnashed their teeth and rushed up the landfill hill to vanquish the beast, afraid though they were. The first one approached the creature. She spit into his eyes and they clouded. The second one approached; where the beast touched her, cancers bloomed. The third one approached with a trembling gait and she took pity upon him, stealing the thoughts from his mind so that he was new like a child. The fourth one approached and the creature snapped her almost-fingers and split a few hydrogen atoms and that's all there ever was.



Elsewhere

He lost his eyes on an unceremonious night. They were lost or stolen, but it doesn't matter because he now needed new ones. He first tried to use flashlights. Those didn't work because he couldn't see depth or dimension. He then tried using magnifying glasses, but it was too dark and the details became disturbing.

He taped a magazine to his face but he couldn't see anything. He stuffed his sockets with savory sweet candy but it rotted away the little vision he had left.

He wanted to see, so he stole from a stranger, but now he was stuck seeing as one who hated seeing. The stolen eyes made the world look very ugly. He tried to give the eyes back, but the letter attached to its return said: "you could have just asked".

With cautious grasping hands he packed everything into a box--the flashlights, magnifying glasses, the magazine, candies, the horrible evil eyes who hated seeing everything--and carried it to a postmaster for assistance. The postmaster taped, stamped, and addressed the package: "Elsewhere". The man gave it to the sky in a gob of balloons.

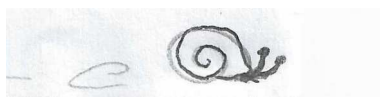
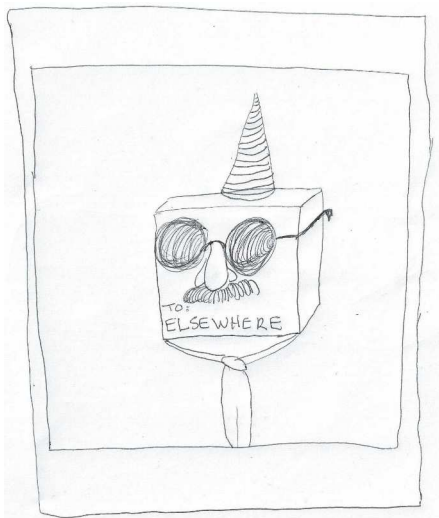
It was a while before the package returned to his doorstep in a kind stranger's hands. The stranger chirped a "Hiya!", in a way that the man assumed came with a smile, and so he said "Hiya" right back, shortly afterwards kicking himself for not just saying "Hi" like he intended.

The stranger said:

"Okay so, I find this box and it says 'elsewhere' on it, and so I'm like: 'This guy for sure wants this box as far away from him as possible,' right? Kind of a strange way to address a package, a package that's floating in the sky, too, which is also kind of weird--anyways--not that its that weird! It's not that weird, sorry--I live a few blocks away and your package tangled itself in my satellite dish--which is fine! Totally fine! Not why I'm here at all--sorry--I just thought the box was cool! It's a good idea and it's obviously part of some healing ritual or whatever, not that it's any of my business--but I thought it would be fun to like, I don't know, participate! I took pictures of the box in various places. Some of them are funny. I don't know if you want to see the box again, but I thought it would be better than throwing it away."

"I can't see the box and I can't see with anything in it. That's why I sent it away. I appreciate the effort. I wish I could see the pictures."

"Do you want me to describe them to you?"



RYLEIGH NORGROVE

#1

I found Rome in the woods.

Although it's fair to admit it's mostly low grasslands
engineered to freeze deep by October

--this being the great temple of a gravel bar where foxes drink from a
river turned stream

and the violent theater of ranger station

lets a raven croak on its stage
complaining of spots soaked in latin.

I really did,

I found it,

and shouldered the ruin-hushed haunted business,
my brain a truck bed,

a lift,

a pulley as big as a whale heart,

whose expletives of cheap wonder drain all over my woodlot
and expanse.

One self-anoints to embellish the day, years, and life thus far.

Glaciers in August.

Fireweed and smoke.

They give off flowers to mark the weeks left,

little time bombers,

little time travelers,

ancient slips red-flagging the countdown to winter

by climbing their own stalks

--there is something perverse about that.

Something perfectly fiendish and self-conscious about that.

Glaciers dream as lurid as Rome,

the worst way below being fire,

with summer snow at night melting off the highest peaks by noon,

distant from our cabin, the size of a hand I held up.

Rome or Glacier,

a mash-up of lunge and cry-out,
predator and prey throwing coins to a fountain,
footholds made first by a hoof,
pickpockets at buses and trains,
nuns queuing up their no-nonsense thorny brambles,
raggedy spruce groves,
a look,
a not to sell loveless love on the street
and a chain of mountains in choral repeat,
saints stained to glass, and the one lung rapturous common sense pope
who's wistful orderlies
and biologies play a kind of flip-book romance.
It's the one big mess of us, in us,
and the generous extraordinary dead prove that
our shabby shared wilderness is set to untangle
bones joints arteries valves.
Happenstance and *right now* drag along
future and past and why the hell not
The Glaciers, The Rome in any of us,
no two
states of being more unlike,
filled with worn-out compulsion to collect and harbor,
piece together,
such *fabulous* unthinkable inventions we've made:
the trash compactor,
the poem,
all tragedy and story,
like pencils sharpened to a point that keeps breaking,
such wilderness gone inward as
an ocean-going ship's container,
a Gatling gun,



the AR-15 of the seething deranged,
the H-bomb,
and the Roman legions.

Grief punctures like ice, moves like a glacier
to flat and slog and myth, low blue and white flowers
we hiked *trail-less*. The rangers insist. They insist--
never follow or lead, never lay down a path.

From above
the look of us spread out, our seven or eight
a band, little
stray exhausted figures

circa: prehistory

it keeps coming, older than Rome,
both body underfoot, understory, underway
and
miles below numb,
it's burning.

#3

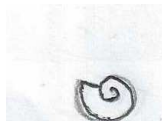
The ocean whose muffled explosions put me to sleep last night also woke me this morning, but not all the way. And yesterday's blue shimmering expanse has become today an unreflecting unrelenting sky whose wash of muted grey refuses to burn off--with here and there a white scribble where a wave rumples over in foam. All day I am some kind of daytime sleepwalker, like the every so often lone hiker whose place I take later, trying to remember last night's dream--nothing prophetic about it, no sense of being or having been dead, though all the details have been washed away with the minds equivalent of surf. I wish I could remember it better, since this is the only way I'm ever going to see him. But even later, when the clouds knot up into dark muscles, piling thunder on the thunder of waves, and revealing flashes the sky's invisible arteries, nothing in either world comes fully into focus, except the steady pulsing of the lighthouse blinking its warning to whoever is out there.



#2

After the moon eclipsed itself
the rumor of darkness true
the whole radiant business almost over
only a line
an edge
like some stray part of a machine
not one of us can figure anymore:
what thrashed or cut
what it sewed quietly together
what it scaled
or brought back from the dead.
After this, I came inside to sleep.

But it's the moon still,
the pale run of it shaping
the door closed against the half-lit hall.
The eye of its own
small flicker orbiting under the lid a few hours.
Not so long
bright rim
giving up is luminant briefly to
mountains under dark and
craters where someone,
then no one, is walking.



BROOKE COX

Dangerous Questions

(After *The Lovers II* by Rene Magritte)

What are we doing here?

together we stand under a white sheet
fabric stretched and draped over our heads
I can still feel it
pressing against
our mouths,
and our noses.

How can I get close enough to you without making this dangerous?

is a question I've been asking myself lately,
whenever I'm standing pressed against you.
when each additional step in your direction feels like
edging closer to an uncertain ending
shrouded in white.

Should we be keeping our distance?

they tell us it's to keep us safe from one another,
but Claustrophobia isn't just boxes;
she's six foot circles and
empty rooms that echo with loneliness
whenever you're not around.

Do you also find this suffocating?

I cannot breathe
with this thin veil of privacy
and pain draped around us.

I am afraid that my selfishness will be
what kills you, but
I am more afraid
of being alone.

What are we going to do about this?

I lean into you,
ignore the alarm bells in my head,
and wonder if this is the last time
our lips will meet.
I want to forget about
the funeral shroud separating me
from you.

What am I afraid of?

I press myself into the blackness of your suit,
kiss Death on the lips and smile.
forgoing common sense for
the uncertainty hidden in my answer:
this love might be the thing
that kills us.

I cannot show you I love you without making this dangerous.

on leaving

Here I am unraveling my heart strings
like sticky red yarn and
watching you drive away from me.

Pulling at memories of nights spent
curled up on your bed
promising we'd run off together, and
picking out thoughts I didn't know I had
because I only discovered love
when it was speeding away from me
at 80 miles an hour.

I couldn't take the thought of you leaving--
can't take another salt-laced goodbye
so I leave the other end of yarn trapped in your car door
like an afterthought.

You cross time zones and
pull my heart across Colorado desert
and over the Great Lakes,
fraying my strings on rocks
and leftover thoughts of you.

Every night I fall asleep and hope I wake up
and forget the way you made me feel.
instead, I wake up three hours before you
on the other side of the country,
tugging at my stick red heart strings and hoping
you don't become someone I never see again.

the visiting habits of ghosts

There are still cold spots where you touched me,

my shoulder

my neck

my back.

Each point reminding me that
there is no such thing as being gone.

But you are no longer You,
you're just the version that stayed.

Yet, here I am
a house full of haunting
still hoping that the ghost of you
will come back and
make a home out of my chest.

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS

BILLY ULLMANN (THEY/THEM)

Billy is a nonbinary queer artist with borderline personality disorder who works primarily in visual arts. They have been writing poetry somewhat privately since they were an adolescent. With a focus on identity, mental illness, and interpersonal relationships, their work is confessional and seeks to untangle the complexities of their, at times, polarizing feelings towards others and themselves. They are a senior at Willamette University majoring in Studio Art with a minor in philosophy. This is their first time publishing poetry.

Learn more about Billy's art on Instagram @billyullmannart

BRITTNEY DIAS (SHE/HER)

Brittney was born and raised in Tacoma, Washington. She graduated with a B.S. in Public Health and has a passion for uplifting voices that are silenced. She is intrigued by unique forms of expressions such as spoken word and dance. Some of her favorite spoken word artists are Olivia Gatwood and Neil Hilborn. Brittney is the author of *Ava and Mae Own a Lemonade Stand*, a book that encourages entrepreneurship among 6-9 year olds and increases diversity in kid's lit. In her free time, Brittney enjoys live music, yoga, and hanging out with friends.

Get to know Brittney on Instagram @britt.dias and on tik tok @booksbybritt

For info about her book, Ava and Mae Own a Lemonade Stand, follow on Instagram @avaandmae

BEN "TWITCH" SCHIFF (THEY/THEM)

Ben was born in Salt Lake City, Utah. They moved to southern California from early childhood through middle school, when their family moved to a small mountain town in Mariposa. After the death of their father, they moved to Chico to further their education in theatre and creative writing. Since then they have created music, theatre and paintings that address their struggle with mental illness and addiction.

PATRICK MACHER (HE/HIM)

Patrick Macher is an Austrian musician and frontman of the rockband Climax. He was born in Koflach, a small town in rural Austria, and started making music around the age of 15. In 2019 Patrick started a band which would become Climax in the future.

Learn more about Climax on Instagram @climax_band_official

MALACHI KORESH (THEY/THEM)

I am Malachi Koresh, non-binary spoken word artist and writer. I'm from the city of Trashville where I lived off and on most of my life. I am currently, well, basically a vagrant in rural Missouri. I've written most of my life but after some years of being a recovering alcoholic I decided to release and promote my art. I started doing spoken word because I needed to fill a slot when I booked friends coming through Nashville. I've released a few EPs and some zines to go along with them. The topics I discuss tend to be about gender issues, depression, suicide and intrusive thoughts, anorexia, addiction and recovery, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, patriarchy, capitalism and critique of the modern left. I identify as anti-capitalist. My art is donation-based and if anyone can't afford anything shoot me a message and I'll get you my art for free. All my recordings should be free on Bandcamp. Solidarity comrades!

Learn more about Malachi's recordings and publications at malpractice66642.bandcamp.com and on Instagram @malachikoresh

JAY HADFIELD (HE/HIM AND THEY/THEM)

Jay grew up outside Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and graduated from Willamette University in 2020. They live in Pittsburgh with their partner Sammie and their cat Tiki. Jay studies Russian literature, and is particularly enamoured with the work of Vladimir Nabokov, Nikolai Gogol, and the Russian prose masters of the 20th century.

DAN JOHNSTON (HE/HIM)

Dan was raised in Brinnon, Washington and lives in Portland, Oregon. He holds a B.A. in Philosophy and is enrolled in a master's program at George Fox University for teaching English language arts and social sciences at the high school level. He is a chronic enthusiast and loves your writing (seriously, big fan). He writes and records songs under the moniker "This Man and the Dream Surfers" because "Daniel Johnston" was taken. As of this writing, there are no other regular members in this group. He explains this away by assuring you that, actually, *you* are the Dream Surfers. His writing is nervous. Dan leads the editorial team of *On Retainer*, and thanks you for getting to know the amazing young people who shared their talent and skill in this little book.

*For info about Dan's music and writing, visit
thismanandthedreamsurfers.bandcamp.com, follow on Instagram
@this_man_and_the_dream_surfers, or email
Johnston.HalfHeartArts@gmail.com*

CLARA WILKINSON (SHE/HER)

Clara grew up in Dufur, Oregon and lives in Portland. She holds a B.A. in Philosophy and plans to continue her studies in the humanities at a graduate level. She is a passionate, talented student and artist, who brings a distinctive voice through several art forms: the written word, music production, sculpture and drawing. Her writing is usually an unflinching line of inquiry embodied in small, surreal narratives or scenes. She didn't exactly *love* the idea of composing a bio, so one was provided for her.

RYLEIGH NORRGROVE (SHE/HER, THEY/THEM, HE/HIM)

Ryleigh Norgrove is a journalist, photographer and wannabe creative from Oregon. Her nonfiction work has been published in literary magazines and newspapers along the west coast. She has interviewed allies and enemies alike, scrambled up mountains, sailed the Pacific, and hitchhiked through the Scottish highlands--subsequently riding the rails, getting off track and losing her train of thought.

BROOKE COX (SHE/HER AND THEY/THEM)

Brooke Cox is a writer, director, and artist from Alamo, California. When she's not completing her degree in Creative Writing and Theatre at Willamette University, she's exploring the outdoors and finding things she thought she lost. Her work varies in medium but typically includes topics such as love, connection, loss, ghosts, and the cyclical nature of life.

You can find Brooke on Instagram @brookec288 and follow them on their journey collecting a life's worth of memories, questions, and rocks.

HALF HEART ARTS

FALL 2021

*On Retainer edited in 2021 by Daniel Mattson, Ryleigh Norgrove,
and Dan Johnston.*

Illustrations by Clara Wilkinson, Dan Johnston, and Bailey Wright.

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